

Unit Project: Analyzing Public Policy Options

In this assignment, students conduct directed research of an issue of significance in Fairfax County and are provided with a framework for their study of that topic.

Connection to POS: Standards 8.1, 8.2, and 8.5

- ◆ *Students will be able to explain the responsibilities of a citizen in the family, school, community, state,.... (8.1.2.a.)*
- ◆ *Students will realize the expectation that responsible citizens become informed about and involved with contemporary and continuing issues in civic life (8.1.3.a.)*
- ◆ *Students will be able to gather information from written, oral, and visual sources (8.5.1.a.)*

SOL Standard: 7.4



Objectives

At the end of this project, students will be able to:

- ◆ acquire information through directed research.
- ◆ explain and analyze the effectiveness of a public policy proposal or decision.



Materials

- ◆ Student Handout – Public Policy Research Guidelines



Time Needed

- ◆ This assignment would be appropriate for a unit or quarter-length project.



Procedures

1. At the end of a unit on Fairfax County, students should be somewhat familiar with the structure, functions, and issues that characterize their county and its government. They should understand the availability of various county resources.

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2. Brainstorm with students a list of crucial issues that emerged during this unit and record the issues on the board. Examples might include:
 - Highway congestion
 - Cable TV contract
 - Gangs/youth violence
 - Inadequate low-income housing
 - Firearms in public facilities
 - Overcrowded schools
3. Assign students to conduct independent research on policy proposals or decisions related to one of the issues. Emphasis should be placed on continuing examination of local media coverage of the proposed issue and related issues. If only a few issues are identified, this may need to be a group project, or multiple students can work independently on the same issue.
4. Provide the students with the attached project guidelines. Be sure that students can break the assignment into smaller, more manageable pieces and review the list of available resources from which they could acquire needed information (i.e., newspaper, library, the *Citizen's Handbook*, Board of Supervisors, etc.)



Assessment

- ◆ Students should be expected to bring their policy issue to the attention of the class in a 3-5 minute presentation. Encourage students to use PowerPoint or another multimedia software package to present their findings and proposed solution. Allow additional time for a question and answer session at the end of the presentation. Students should be able to speak clearly on their topic with minimal notes and defend their position and proposed solution. Be sure to build in “checkpoints” over the course of the project to ensure that students are keeping up with the assignment and completing it in manageable pieces.
- ◆ The guidelines given to the students at the beginning of the project offer you an ideal grading rubric for the final research project in conjunction with the enclosed oral presentation scoring guide.



Extensions

- ◆ Use the same research project design as a guideline for a similar assignment on policy making at the state and federal level. A culminating activity at the end of the year could involve comparing the three issues as well as how they were handled at their respective level of government.
- ◆ Invite county officials or policy makers to present information on the selected issues to the class.



Differentiations

- ◆ Provide local newspaper articles to students on the issues that they are following in an effort to help them get started.
- ◆ Bookmark useful websites for researching the topic on computers in your classroom.
- ◆ Provide copies of the Weekly Agenda for students so that they can keep up with items of concern that the Board of Supervisors might be addressing. Advise students to tune in to Channel 16 occasionally to see if items relating to their issue are being discussed.
- ◆ Allow students to work in pairs if they are researching the issue.



Interdisciplinary Connections

- ◆ Ask the math teacher on your team to discuss polling and the use of statistics in public policy with students on the team. Discuss how figures can be used to present a certain image to the public.